

Happy Birthday, Bahá'u'lláh



Bahá'í Gardens in Haifa, Israel
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November 12 marks a special day in the Bahá'í faith. In 1817, their founder, Mira Husayn 'Alí, later known as Bahá'u'lláh (bah-HAH-oo-luh), was born in Persia (now Iran). Because their calendar days begin at sunset, Bahá'u'lláh's birthday actually began last evening. The Bahá'í community in the U.S. self-identifies as the “newest of the world's independent religions,” with over 160,000 adherents in this country alone. Their primary message is unity. They believe God is one and that all religions derive from God. They believe in the oneness of the human family and that all prejudices must be overcome. They believe

that God has been revealed to humankind through a series of messengers, including Abraham, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad. And they believe that our lasting vision must be world peace.

Bahá'u'lláh's story actually begins with Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad and a group within Shia Islam, known as the Twelvers. For hundreds of years, they had waited for the arrival of a new messianic figure, al-Qā'im. By the mid-1800s, the Twelvers had been informed by one of their leaders that the arrival of al-Qā'im was imminent. One evening, in 1844, Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad revealed himself as the Báb, or Gate, to al-Qā'im. Others soon recognized his spiritual authority, and the Báb gained a following. Initially, he encouraged strict adherence to sharia law, but within a few years, the Bábists made a clear break from Islam. Muslim clerics opposed the movement and forcefully tried to repress it. Bábists were massacred, and in 1850, the Báb, himself, was executed. More deaths followed.

Bahá'u'lláh, one of the Báb's followers, survived but was imprisoned in an underground dungeon in Tehran called the “Black Pit.” While there, he was called to his mission through a vision. “I beheld a Maiden...suspended in the air before Me...her countenance shone with the ornament of the good-pleasure of God, and her cheeks glowed with the brightness of the All-Merciful.” Within ten years, Bahá'u'lláh publicly claimed to be al-Qā'im, the Messenger of God foretold by the Báb. Bahá'u'lláh was a prolific writer, penning thousands of texts on religious doctrine, prayer, moral teachings, and his claim to be the Manifestation of God. The total volume of his work is said to be more than 15x longer than the Christian Bible.

So how do Bahá'ís celebrate Bahá'u'lláh's birth? As one of nine annual Bahá'í holy days, followers are encouraged to refrain from work if possible, using the day for reflection or family time. Each Bahá'í community develops its own celebration. Our local community honored Bahá'u'lláh with a service last evening. There were several dramatic readings that included details about Bahá'u'lláh's life and

his prophethood. Bahá'í communities/families might also light candles to express gratitude for the prophet, sing songs, craft gifts that Bahá'u'lláh would appreciate, or make decorations for their homes or places of worship. Internet templates for nine-pointed stars and nine-sided polygons are also popular for kids' crafts since Bahá'í temples are built in that shape.

One story, in particular, speaks to many Bahá'í families as they honor the birth of Bahá'u'lláh. In this story, Bahá'u'lláh is a child watching a puppet show performed as part of his older brother's marriage festivities. During the show, the puppet king was seated on his throne, surrounded by princes and other dignitaries. A puppet thief was brought before the high court. The king pronounced his judgment, and the puppet executioner cut off the thief's head. The puppet king then dispatched troops to quell an uprising, while cannon fire boomed in the background. It was an impressive show for both the guests and for the young Bahá'u'lláh. Twenty minutes later, however, Bahá'u'lláh saw the entire puppet show reduced to a box being carried away from the stage. Kings, princes, and rebels were squished together unceremoniously. As Bahá'u'lláh later wrote, "Ever since that day, all the trappings of the world have seemed in the eyes of this Youth akin to that same spectacle."

The global Bahá'í community now includes over five million people from nearly 200 different countries. Followers of the faith come from a variety of religious traditions to study the writings of the Báb and Bah'u'lláh and to reconfirm their commitment to equality, social and economic justice, and the termination of racial and ethnic strife. Sadly, the Bahá'í community in Iran, the faith's country of origin, suffers ongoing persecution. A recent UN report on the state of human rights in Iran specifically mentioned that Bahá'í members "face arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment, national security charges for active involvement in religious affairs, restrictions on religious practice, denial of higher education, obstacles to State employment and abuses within schools." Today, I intend to honor the founder's birthday by sending out a prayer for world peace, a doctrine that lies at the core of all Bah'u'lláh's teachings.

For more information on the Bahá'í faith:

[Official Website of U.S. Bahá'ís](#)

[International Website of the Bahá'ís](#)

For more specific ideas about how kids might celebrate Bahá'u'lláh's birthday:

[Sharing Bahá'u'lláh's Birthday with our Children](#)

For Bahá'u'lláh's writings:

[The Bahá'í Reference Library](#)

(Both the puppet tale and the story of the heavenly maiden can be found in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* on p. 5 and pp. 165-168.)

For more information on the persecution of the Bahá'í in Iran:

[Bahá'í World News Service](#)